

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5628
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CINCPAC HONOLULU

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BG
SUBJ: MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH

1. THE BANGLADESH ELECTION COMMISSION ANNOUNCED
JULY 31 THAT MUNICIPAL (POURASHAVA) ELECTIONS WOULD
BE HELD IN DACCA AUGUST 28, 1977. THE FILING OF NOMINATION
PAPERS WILL BE HELD AUGUST 6. AUGUST 28 ACTUALLY IS A
NEW DATE FOR THE DACCA ELECTIONS; THE ORIGINAL DATE
OF AUGUST 13 WILL CONTINUE TO APPLY IN OTHER
MUNICIPALITIES AND NOMINATIONS ARE ALREADY BEING FILED.

2. THE POURASHAVA ELECTIONS ARE SIMILAR TO THE UNION
PARISHAD ELECTIONS HELD LAST JANUARY. THE MAJOR DIS-
TINCTION BETWEEN THE TWO IS THAT THE UNION PARISHAD MEMBERS
REPRESENT A COLLECTION OF VILLAGES, USUALLY NOT MORE THAN
TWENTY, WHEREAS THE POURASHAVA MEMBERS REPRESENT THE
TOWNS AND CITIES. AS IN THE PARISHAD ELECTIONS, THE
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POURASHAVA ELECTIONS OFFICIALLY WILL BE NON-PARTISAN,
ALTHOUGH THE VOTERS (AND THE GOVERNMENT) WILL KNOW
WHICH PARTIES LOCAL CONTENDERS SUPPORT. THE DUTIES AND
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POURASHAVA MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN
ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE FOR UNION PARISHAD MEMBERS. BOTH
GROUPS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COORDINATION OF DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS AND OTHER LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS AND HAVE LIMITED

REVENUE RAISING POWERS.

3. TRADITIONALLY, THE MEMBERS OF THE POURASHAVA, CALLED COMMISSIONERS, ARE DIRECTLY ELECTED WITH THE CHAIRMAN SELECTED INDIRECTLY BY THE COMMISSIONERS FROM THEIR GROUP. IN THE COMING ELECTION, HOWEVER, THE CHAIRMEN WILL ALSO BE ELECTED DIRECTLY, FOLLOWING THE PRECEDENT ESTABLISHED IN THE UNION PARISHAD ELECTIONS IN JANUARY. THERE WILL BE ONE EXCEPTION TO THE DIRECT ELECTION OF CHAIRMEN, HOWEVER. IT WAS DECIDED ONLY TEN DAYS AGO THAT THE DACCA MUNICIPALITY CHAIRMAN WOULD BE INDIRECTLY SELECTED BY THE MEMBERS. IN EXPLANATION, THE ELECTION COMMISSION SAID THAT THE DACCA AREA WAS TOO LARGE FOR A CONVENIENT DIRECT ELECTION OF ONE CANDIDATE. DACCA HAS BEEN DIVIDED INTO FIFTY WARDS, WITH ONE COMMISSIONER FROM EACH WARD.

4. ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ELECTIONS SEEMS ALMOST NON-EXISTANT. WHEREAS THE UNION PARISHAD MEMBERS ARE BIG MEN WHO CAN BRING CERTAIN BENEFITS ON THE VILLAGE LEVEL, THE LARGER AND LESS COHESIVE URBAN SETTING OF THE POURASHAVA REDUCES THE INFLUENCE OF THE COMMISSIONERS. THE BDG HAS MADE NO ATTEMPT YET TO AROUSE ENTHUSIASM.

5. COMMENT: THE DECISION TO KEEP THE DACCA MUNICIPALITY CHAIRMAN FROM BEING ELECTED DIRECTLY LEAVES THE BDG OPEN TO CHARGES OF TAMPERING WITH ITS ANNOUNCED ELECTORAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROCESS. THE POLITICIANS HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY, DECLARING THAT THE DECISION DENIES THE CITIZENS OF DACCA EQUAL STATUS WITH OTHERS. THEN DECISION UNDOUBTEDLY RESULTS FROM A BELATED RECOGNITION BY THE BDG THAT ANY MAN COMMANDING THE SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF THE MORE THAN ONE MISSION RESIDENTS OF THE CAPITAL CITY WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL FORCE, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THE POTENTIALLY VOLATILE MIXTURE OF HOMELESS REFUGEES, STUDENTS, LABOR AND INTELLECTUALS IN DACCA. IF THE LACK OF POLITICAL INTEREST CONTINUES, HOWEVER, THE BDG'S RATHER LAME EXCUSE WILL BE ACCEPTED AND THE POLITICIANS' LAMENTATIONS WILL BE IGNORED. BERGESSEN

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